



Public Safety shares \$1.5 million of E-911 grant expended, pilot projects proceed in Budget and Finance Committee report

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Updates on a federal grant awarded to the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety (DPS) for enhanced 911 (E-911) services were given to the Budget and Finance Committee (BFC) on Tuesday. The system would improve public safety services through technology upgrades along with completion of rural addressing projects that would establish street addresses on the Navajo Nation.

DPS Executive Director Jesse Delmar was joined by Navajo Police Department (NPD) Chief of Police Phillip Francisco, Captain Leonard Redhorse III and Captain Ronald Silversmith in presenting the report to the BFC.

Francisco said Navajo police call dispatchers, for decades, operated with regular land-line phones with no ability to capture location data, phone call-back numbers, call recordings and other critical information. The E-911 system will enable the NPD to record that information, along with some location data using triangulation with cell phones.

Redhorse reported approximately \$1.5 million of a US Department of Homeland Security (USDHS) Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) infrastructure development award was spent by the NPD to implement the system in Shiprock and Crownpoint. Those chapters previously completed the local rural addressing activities and were ready to integrate into the new system.

A large part of an E-911 system for the entire Navajo Nation will rely on the completion of rural addressing, Francisco indicated. “That requires all the rest of the chapters to get up to speed on this,” said Francisco.

NPD also described its proposal to modernize police call dispatch centers.

Redhorse explained phone providers transfer incoming calls to administrative phone lines where NPD staff take records. There is no mechanism for recording calls, reviewing call logs and other related functions because 911 calls received by the NPD are analogue lines.

A pilot project currently underway by DPS in Dził Ná’oodíłii successfully translated those signals from existing equipment to a new digital system. That location was chosen as a best-case scenario due to its proximity to multiple internet fiber lines and conduits. Redhorse indicated a future full implementation of the E-911 system will be limited by the availability of fiber lines.

In the course of the project, Redhorse also said NPD created policies and procedures for call dispatchers and is now working to establish a supervisor position specifically for the developing NPD 911 Program.

A fully deployed consolidated dispatch site would cost a projected \$43 million.

More work would also need to be completed for approximately 185,000 structures across the Navajo Nation needing street addresses. That data will populate the master street address system used by the E-911 system.

Navajo Nation Telecommunications Regulatory Commission Executive Director Christopher Becenti explained rural addressing impacts travel, personal finance and the collection of taxes that should be directed to the Navajo Nation.

“It’s time we get rural addressing done,” said Becenti, adding support for legislative initiatives relating to rural addressing projects.

Rural Addressing and Geographical Information System (GIS) Coordinator MC Baldwin with the Navajo Nation Addressing Authority indicated rural addressing relies on the work of local committees. A major challenge to the initiative has been the lack of activity in completing local rural addressing committee (LRAC) work at the local chapter level.

In New Mexico, Baldwin said Mexican Water Chapter adopted an alternative form of addressing that utilizes ‘plus codes’ for locations that don’t have street addresses. But, the chapter would still require street addresses, stated Baldwin.

“In terms of Budget and Finance Committee, what investment do you need?” asked Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadíí’áhi/Tó Ko’í, Red Valley, Tooh Haaltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé ałnáozt’í’í), who requested the report. She sought recommendations for oversight committees on directives to programs so the E-911 system is supported in its implementation.

“It’s criminal that our federal government is not fully funding our public safety,” said Crotty. A lack of federal support has led to gaps in data collected from call centers used in abuse and crime prevention work.

“There is a need for more officers. Probably our number one priority is to boost our numbers,” said Delmar. He said Navajo Nation law enforcement officer positions are competitive in the region and the DPS is actively promoting open positions to the Navajo public.

Delmar also said the division created budgets for computer-aided dispatch system (CADS) software during the previous administration. Those proposals were not given final approval.

The DPS indicated it is working with the Navajo Nation Division of Community Development (DCD) to pursue funding from the State of New Mexico. It is also working with the Navajo Nation Department of Justice to ensure grants are fully utilized.

The BFC received a draft proposal and draft budget forms for a NPD 911 Program for consideration. The committee is empowered with oversight of all financial and funding matters relating to the Navajo Nation government.

The BFC voted to accept the report on Tuesday, Feb. 16, with a vote of five in favor and none opposed.

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